

It's All About the Coffee or Is It?

By Roberta John

WINDOW ROCK, AZ. - When it comes to coffee, it's all about the coffee or is it?

Not if you're going to drink coffee at a newly-opened coffee house here in the Navajo Nation capital....more specifically, at the Navajo Nation Museum.

There is coffee and then there is gourmet quality coffee.

Entrepreneur Robert Fontenot states, "We want people to enjoy our gourmet flavored coffee and have a high-end experience."

As the owner of two other coffee shops – Coffee House and Express Yourself in Gallup, New Mexico, Fontenot said, "It is important to look at the quality of your ingredients."

All the different flavored coffee is hand done and hand-pressed.

However, he emphasized that it's not just about the coffee, but the experience.

In fact, Fontenot said the staff he is training want the new high-end café to have a theme called "An Espresso and Specialty Drink Experience."

Fontenot echoes his staff's view on how they want customers to feel and was quick to point out that you when you're slow as molasses in the winter, the Navajo Nation Museum Café is the place you want to be.

As a second generation share cropper originally from New Orleans, Fontenot knows the value of sharing life stories.

"My grandparents didn't have running water," Fontenot reflected. "My family has always been big on sharing stories."

His initial calling came about six years ago when he came out with a church group and helped out community members within the Church Rock, N.M. Chapter.

“I got to know about the Navajo culture,” he said. “I was drawn to the place and found the Navajo people have an enchanting spirit.”

He soon became a substitute teacher at Tohatchi Middle School and was taken in by some Navajo families who shared life stories with him.

In 2012, the Coffee House in Gallup went up for sale. Fontenot and a partner pooled their resources and purchased it.

He was then approached by Navajo Nation Museum Department Manager Manuelito Wheeler to see if they would be interested in operating a similar coffee house in the Navajo Nation capital.

Manuelito said it has always been his goal to have a successful coffee house on the Navajo Nation.

Fontenot was just what he was looking for....And it was no coincidence the two met.

Navajo culture resonates at the Navajo Nation Museum Café.

From a distance and dovetailing nicely is a beautiful Navajo shade house that gives it a warm and inviting welcome.

In actuality, the Navajo shade house is made of PVC pipe that's been fired to give it a little rustic charm and true Navajo character.

Manuelito said he wanted to transform the new café with a Navajo curb appeal and a Navajo accent to lure in new customers.

It may just be Navajo Nation's Best Kept Secret, but Manuelito and Fontenot hope not for long.

There was a soft opening on November 24th, but they're banking on new clients that will navigate themselves to revel in the new coffee café.

After all, Navajo cultural protocol is all about sharing stories....and what better way to do that than with a high-end cup of gourmet coffee nestled against towering red-yawning walls.

“We want everyone to share their stories here at the Navajo Nation Museum Café,” Fontenot stated. “Our goal is to have a standard of excellence. We want to provide a high-end quality coffee experience for everyone. And it all begins with your favorite coffee.”

Fontenot said they will eventually open at 7 a.m. to accommodate people who want to take care of the first order of business right after the crack of early morning dawn and close around 6 p.m.

Echoes of Navajo tradition will remain so your senses will experience authentic imagery and details of Navajo history.

Manuelito said the café will keep the existing black and white vintage photos of early Navajo history as a reminder of where the Navajo people came from.

Naturally, there are hand-carved pine wood tables and benches that pull it altogether to give the eatery a down-to-earth country bravado. Meticulously-designed wood furniture by Navajo Nation Museum staff provides a nice accent and dimension to the Navajo Nation Museum lobby. The stylized furniture was cut fresh from the Chuska Mountains, compliments of the Navajo Nation Department of Forestry.

The Navajo Nation Museum Café....where the quiet sway of ancient Navajo wisdom and modern-day culture weaves together to create a new story and a new palette of deliciousness.

A place where the experience is as satisfying as the flavor.

The menu reflects the sophistication.

In addition to a host of flavored coffees from Espresso, Cappacino, Lattes, Mocha and hot or cold drink called Moolicious,, Fontenot said they also offer “Build Your Own

Premier” omelette, salad or sandwiches in the future, noting, “We don’t want to rush into this; however, we want to take it slow and let the coffee house breathe.”

So if you like it hot or cold....perhaps it’s time for you to enrich your coffee experience and appreciate life’s simple pleasures at the Navajo Nation Museum Café.

And if lunch is faster than the Grinch stole Christmas, you still have plenty of time to enjoy alfresco dining nestled against towering red canyon walls.

Let’s rewind....Just think....it all started when two individuals from two different cultures crossed paths and now they’ve come full circle here at the Navajo Nation Museum Cafe.

It must be karma....and a recipe for success.

For more information about the Navajo Nation Museum Café or the Navajo Nation Museum, contact them at (928) 871-7941 or www.navajonationmuseum.org